

History in a Nutshell

The Fundamental Orders of Connecticut

Grade Level: 3-5

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to:

1. Explain why Connecticut is known as the "Constitution State." (Connecticut Social Studies Frameworks HIST 3.4-5)
2. State the main idea of the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut and explain how this early "constitutional" government was different from typical governments of its time. (Connecticut Social Studies Frameworks CIV 5.1-2)

Program Framework:

1. Introductory Video
2. Close-Looking Activity
3. Independent Practice

Materials: introductory video; images for close-looking activity

Teacher background:

In May of 1638, Reverend Thomas Hooker, founder of Hartford, preached a powerful sermon in which he argued that "the foundation of authority is laid in the free consent of the people." Eight months later, on January 14, 1639, the "freemen" of Hartford, Windsor, and Wethersfield – men who had formally been accepted as inhabitants of their towns and who had taken an oath of allegiance to Connecticut – assembled in Hartford and adopted the Fundamental Orders, the framework for a new government. Nowhere in the document was there any reference to the king or to any government outside of Connecticut itself. The foundation of this government was indeed the free consent of the people. The right to vote for colonial officials was granted to all freemen, not just members of Puritan congregations, as in nearby Massachusetts. Some consider the Fundamental Orders to be the first written constitution, and a prototype for our Federal Constitution – thus Connecticut's nickname, the "Constitution State."

Unlike the Constitution, the Fundamental Orders did not provide for the "checks and balances" of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, nor did it call for the separation of church and state. In exploring the Fundamental Orders, students can learn about the evolution of voting rights and the role of religion in American democracy.

1. Introductory Video

Images shown:

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1. Connecticut License Plate AH39871, September 2019, Courtesy of Gojira91, CC BY-SA (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>).
2. *Emigration of Hooker and his party to Hartford*, S.H. Clark, 1850-1859, Connecticut Historical Society, 1960.148.0.
3. *First Meeting House Built in Connecticut*, John Warner Barber, 1836, Connecticut Historical Society, 1953.5.317.
4. *Image of the first page of the original copy of the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut*, Courtesy of the Museum of Connecticut History, Connecticut State Library.

2. Close-Looking Activity Options

1. This activity can be done with students in real time, either in the classroom or virtually, with the teacher guiding students using [Visual Thinking Strategies](#) to connect the images to what students learned in the introductory video.
 - a. *What's going on in this picture?*
 - b. *What makes you say that?*
 - c. *What more can we find?*
2. Alternatively, students can explore the images on their own, using the guiding questions that are provided for each image below.
3. Close-Looking Images
 - a. *Page from Henry Wolcott, Jr.'s shorthand notebook of sermons, 1638-1641, Connecticut Historical Society, Ms 88655. [Background information: We know the words Thomas Hooker spoke from notes taken in an early version of shorthand by Henry Wolcott, Jr., a man who heard them in person.]*
 - i. *This page is written using an early form of shorthand. What is **shorthand** and why might a writer use it to capture the words of a speaker?*
 - ii. *What is a **sermon**? Why do you think Henry Wolcott, Jr. believed Rev. Thomas Hooker's sermons were important enough to write down?*
 - iii. *Why might a museum like the Connecticut Historical Society save a notebook like this one?*
 - b. *Mr. Hooker and his congregation travelling through the wilderness, Printed by Samuel E. Brown, before 1860, Connecticut Historical Society, 1998.152.86.*
 - i. *Thinking back to the video you watched, what do you think is going on in this image?*
 - ii. *The artist calls the setting of this engraving a "wilderness." What is a **wilderness**? What does the artist put in his picture to make the setting seem like a wilderness?*
 - iii. *How might you feel if you were one of the people in this image?*

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- c. *Bulkeley Bridge Celebration: Thomas Hooker Party Preparing to Land in Hartford, East Hartford*, Photographer unknown, October 1908, Connecticut Historical Society, 2000.210.11. [Background information: The Bulkeley Bridge opened to trolley traffic on December 8, 1907 and to the general public on December 21, 1907. The dedication of the bridge was the occasion of a three-day celebration in October 1908.]
 - i. *What are the people in this photograph doing? Why do you think they're dressed the way they are?*
 - ii. *This photograph and the Samuel Brown engraving you just saw offer different versions of the same event. How do they compare?*
 - iii. *Why might people reenact scenes or events from the past? Have you ever seen a historical reenactment?*
- d. *Thomas Hooker*, Plaster Bust by Frances Wadsworth, ca. 1938, Connecticut Historical Society, 2013.30.9.
 - i. *Nobody knows what Thomas Hooker really looked like so the artist who created this sculpture based it on how she thought an ideal colonist might have appeared. Why do you think we don't have any images of Thomas Hooker from his time?*
 - ii. *Based on how she shows him here, do you think the artist had a positive or negative opinion of Thomas Hooker? Why?*
 - iii. *Why is Thomas Hooker so important to the history of Connecticut – and even the country?*

3. Options for Independent Practice

1. Writing for Understanding

Have students create a government for their school or town. Have students decide on a philosophy for their government, similar to Thomas Hooker's statement that government comes from "the free consent of the people." Students should then write a document or draw a diagram outlining the structure and rules of their government.

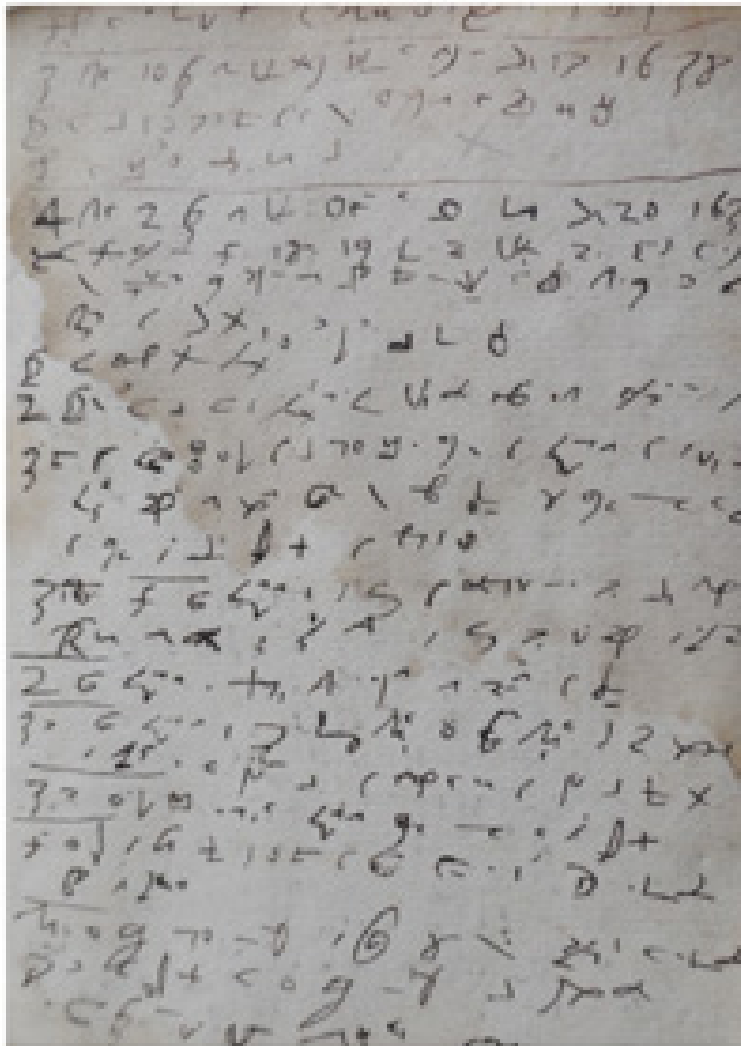
2. Contemporary Connections

The Fundamental Orders granted voting rights to a larger group of people than other English colonies at the time, though the right was still limited to the free, white men of the Connecticut colony. Discuss the evolution of voting rights in American history as a class. Then have students collect voter registration data and voting percentages from the last election for their community. Ask students to consider why there is such a difference between the number of people who have the right to vote today and the number that

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actually participate in the electoral process. What do they think the people who fought for the right to vote in the past – women and people of color – would think about voter participation today?

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Page from Henry Wolcott, Jr.'s shorthand notebook of sermons, 1638-1641, Connecticut Historical Society, Ms 88655.

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MR. HOOKER AND HIS CONGREGATION TRAVELING THROUGH THE WILDERNESS.—[See Page 31.]

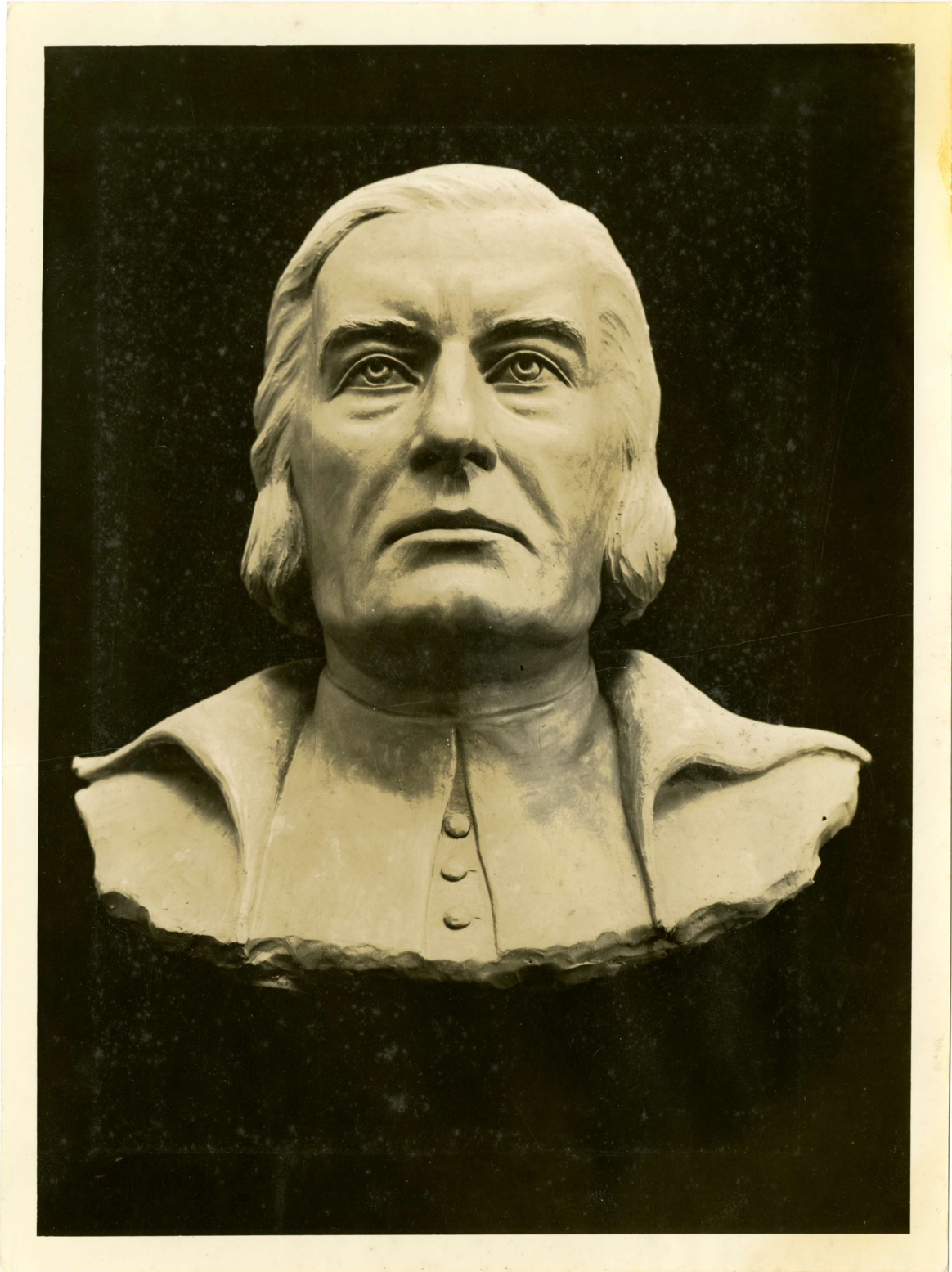
Mr. Hooker and his congregation travelling through the wilderness, Printed by Samuel E. Brown, before 1860, Connecticut Historical Society, 1998.152.86.

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Thomas Hooker, Plaster Bust by Frances Wadsworth, ca. 1938, Connecticut Historical Society, 2013.30.9.